

Citation for published version:

Dillet, B 2016, Deleuze's Transformation of the Project of Ideology Critique: Noology Critique. in C Meiborg & S van Tuinen (eds), *Deleuze and the Passions*. Punctum Books, New York, pp. 125-146.
<<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/deleuze-and-the-passions/>>

Publication date:

2016

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

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Deleuze's Transformation of the Ideology–Critique Project: Noology Critique

Benoît Dillet

[A concept] has nothing to do with ideology. A concept is full of critical and political force of liberty. It is precisely its power as a system that brings out what is good or bad, what is or is not new, what is or is not alive in a group of concepts.
— Gilles Deleuze¹

Introduction: Ideology... what ideology?

Fifty years after the publication of *Reading Capital* by Louis Althusser and his students, the political landscape is unrecognizable. We are immersed in economic parlance, from politicians, experts, and intellectuals: everyone claims to know best how to control the deficit, how to regulate the banking systems, how to stop the flows of tax evasion, etc. Although the press has perhaps been too quick at pointing out the resurgence of Karl Marx and Marxist thought in the wake of the economic crisis, we are nonetheless witnessing a certain turn to political economy in continental philosophy. It is as if critical theory had forgotten

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 32.

about the economic order and on waking up to a totally disorganized and deeply unequal world, it suddenly found itself being accused by some of being compromised by the capitalist machinery, and by others as being speculative or naive. But this situation is hardly new; the end of the 1970s — with the rise of a discourse against the “totalitarian left” and preparations for the neoliberal shock therapies — also saw a resurgence of the problems of economic reason and ideology. When we charge critical theory of being compromised by putting forward creativity or acceleration as the ideology of neoliberal capitalism, we denounce (or regret) that ideology was not taken into account. Pierre Macherey notes that Michel Foucault’s conscious distancing from Marxist parlance meant that “the concept [of ideology] did not have to be taken into account”² since it had lost its substance, its facility to diagnose 1970s’ political economy. Instead, Foucault deliberately wanted to create new concepts to overcome the Marxist regime of discourse. Not simply to reject the predominance of capital over labor, but to supplement the analysis with a more refined understanding of political reality (discipline, governmentality, and biopolitics). Furthermore, Foucault aimed to move away from the ideology/science dialectic, dominant in the French left in the 1960s–1970s.³ I argue that the discussion of ideology is not only implicitly present in the work of Foucault and that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,

2 Pierre Macherey, *Le sujet des normes* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2014), 216.

3 In the section entitled “Knowledge [*savoir*] and ideology” in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault attempted to overcome explicitly this opposition. “It can be said that political economy has a role in capitalist society, that it serves the interests of the bourgeois class, that it was made by and for that class” or “ideology is not exclusive of scientificity” (Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Alan M. Sheridan Smith [London: Routledge, 2002], 204, 205). Étienne Balibar comments on Marx’s difficulty in seeing the “Bourgeois political economy” as ideology given its scientificity (and the absence of abstraction or inverted reality), but Marx overcame this difficulty by writing “a critique of political economy.” See Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (London/New York: Verso Books, 2007), 54–6.

but a central aspect of their work. In order to do so I reconstruct their position vis-à-vis ideology to understand more broadly their engagement with political economy and the critique of the images of capitalism.

By contrasting too starkly between the subjective (ideology) and the objective (science), the irrational and the rational, political economy fails to take into account the production of desire in capitalism. This is problematic, since the abstraction of desire — taking place alongside the abstraction of labor — should not be taken for granted but rather be put at the center of a renewed ideology critique. By integrating desire with the infrastructure, “[l]ibidinal economy is no less objective than political economy,” write Deleuze and Guattari.⁴ To establish a libidinal economy is another way of doing a critique of political economy and demonstrating the noological production of science, without falling into the extreme opposite position that places desire as the irrational force to be celebrated:

[t]here is an unconscious libidinal investment of desire that does not necessarily coincide with the preconscious investments of interest, and that explains how the latter can be perturbed and perverted in “the darkest organization,’ below all ideology.⁵

The darkest organization here is what I want to revisit as “noology,” and I will define this project as the re-materialization of ideology critique.

My interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s work here follows and complements Macherey’s recent studies on ideology that attempt *to think ideology today* (by reading Foucault), that is, when after Daniel Bell and others, the end of ideology was

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 345.

5 Ibid., translation modified.

proclaimed.⁶ Macherey's position is particularly interesting since he does not want to discard this disappearance of ideology and instead makes a parallel between the discourse on the end of ideology and Foucault's work on the society of norms. Ideology has become both ubiquitous and imperceptible, and critics have either given up in front of ideology since it is most adaptable, invisible, and indiscernible, or worse they have also believed that ideology had vanished, as if contemporary societies were post-capitalist and post-materialist. Macherey's rhetorical question is: "is only a society without ideology possible?"⁷ In asking this question and arguing for the persistence of the theme of ideology, he does not claim that society should be or can be without ideology, but that the problem is not posed correctly. It should be posed in terms of normalization and discipline rather than ideology and repression.

As Alberto Toscano has recently argued (following Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc), the new concepts introduced by Foucault often supplement the Marxist critique of political economy: it is capital that conditions biopolitics, and therefore requires "a revision in the very notion of 'ideology'."⁸ Deleuze and Guattari understood this move very early on and integrated it into their work. They argue that alienation and subjection should not be understood in terms of ideology and ideological structures, but by drawing the diagrams of the technologies of power and the emergence of the normalizing power. For instance, in 1973, they explain:

Ideology has no importance here: what matters is not ideology, and not even the "economic/ideological" distinction or

6 Pierre Macherey, *Études de philosophie "française": De Sieyès à Barni* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 63–110; Macherey, *Le sujet des normes*, 213–352.

7 Macherey, *Études*, 96.

8 Alberto Toscano, "What Is Capitalist Power? Reflections on 'Truth and Juridical Forms,'" in *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, eds. Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli, 26–42 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 33.

opposition; what matters is the organization of power. Because the *organization of power*, i.e., the way in which desire is already in the economic, the way libido invests the economic, haunts the economic and fosters the political forms of repression.⁹

For them, ideology as understood and commonly used by Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s prevented an understanding of the organization of power, the becoming-state of all organizations, and particularly that of the French Communist Party (PCF) that aspired to duplicate and replicate the Soviet Communist Party apparatus by using its scientific propositions. For Deleuze and Guattari, the Marxist use of infrastructure (the material condition) and superstructure (culture, ideas, desire, and ideology) prevents the integration of desire and affects into a critique of political economy, when diagnosing the material constitution of humans, particularly in relation to employment and work. They briefly introduced the concept of “noology” at the end of *A Thousand Plateaus*, in the 12th and 14th plateaus, almost as an afterthought, to leave the book as an open book and an open system: “Noology, which is distinct from ideology, is precisely the study of images of thought, and their historicity.”¹⁰

A noological model is concerned not with thought contents (ideology) but with the form, manner or mode, and function of thought, according to the mental space it draws and from the point of view of a general theory of thought, a thinking of thought.¹¹

- 9 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 263, emphasis in the original.
- 10 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 376.
- 11 Ibid., 499–500.

It is not what one thinks or what a class thinks that matters, but how they think it, in what assemblages thought takes place, and for what purpose. For the moment, it is enough to remark that they intend to collapse the two-level analysis of ideology critique, and rather analyze the wiring of thought. I will unpack these two quotations along two lines: first by showing that Deleuze and Guattari did not radically discard ideology-critique but transformed it by adding new problems (particularly that of affects and desire), and second, by pointing to the potentials of a noology critique, when we understand noology as a re-materialized understanding of ideology.¹² Although I am taking these two quotations from *A Thousand Plateaus* as the starting point of my argument, I will mostly focus on *Anti-Oedipus* and the critique of familialism in this essay to show their engagement in ideology critique.

To introduce the context of noology critique as their transformation of ideology critique, we need to note that for Deleuze and Guattari, it is on the one hand a continuation of the project of the reversal of Platonism started by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, but on the other hand to resist an anti-Platonism that is equally idealist — placing thought above everything else, before the body, a thought without the body but also a body without thoughts, or a body without organs. The increasing forms of mental alienation today, linked to a cognitive and affective capitalism, have only furthered the division of mental and physical labor rather than abolished it. Everyone is a proletarian, and by using the expression “proletarian ideology,” Marx-

12 This is also what Fredric Jameson perceived in his chapter on Deleuze: the noology critique project is to expose the ideology of dualism (and Jameson finds the contemporary resurgence of ethics as a specialized discipline as paradigmatic). See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London/New York: Verso Books, 2009), 181–200. Another contribution worth signaling is Jason Read’s brilliant article on noology that focuses on commodity fetishism and abstract labor. Read is in dialogue with Marx’s later work (when the thematic of commodity fetishism replaces that of ideology). See Jason Read, “The Fetish is Always Actual, Revolution is Always Virtual: From Noology to Noopolitics,” *Deleuze Studies* 3, supplement (2009): 78–101.

ists have largely displaced the meaning and the role of ideology. Marx and Friedrich Engels never used this expression since the very concept of ideology always already refers to the dominant “worldview.”¹³ I simplify a much longer story here, but this “vacillation” of the concept of ideology led many Marxists to adopt largely idealist views.¹⁴ To take one example out of many, we can refer to the Marxist cinema historian, Georges Sadoul, as commented on by André Bazin. Bazin notes that in writing about the origins of cinema, Sadoul had forgotten about the technical invention of cinema and argued for “a reversal of the historical order of causality, which goes from the economic infrastructure to the ideological superstructure,”¹⁵ as if “cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed so to speak fully armed in their minds, as if in some platonic heaven [...]”¹⁶ The idealist use of ideology consists here in thinking that ideas invented cinema and that scientists and technicians had almost no role to play, that cinema was not born in the experiments with technical objects. The idealist conception of ideology reduced ideology-critique to a battle of ideas, forgetting the affective and the material formation of ideology itself.

13 Étienne Balibar makes this important point that historically the “proletarian worldview” is “inseparable from the goal of constructing a party,” that is an institution with a formal structure, and not simply some vague ideas of class consciousness (that is also absent from Marx). Yet can any party exist without a general theory of thought? (Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. James Swenson [London: Routledge, 1994], 153).

14 “The current uses of the term ideology, Marxist and non-Marxist [...] tend to fall back to one side or other of a classic demarcation line between the theoretical [...] and the practical” (Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner [London/New York: Verso Books, 2007], 45).

15 André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17.

16 Ibid.

Ideology is dead, long live noology!

I want to propose the hypothesis that the notion of noology is useful to understand the transformation, rather than the denial, of ideology during the 1970s and 1980s in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. A crucial aspect of this transformation is their insistence that “*desire is part of the infrastructure*.”¹⁷ The significance of this statement and what it implies can be summed up in two points. First, Deleuze and Guattari attempted in *Anti-Oedipus* to supplement the critique of political economy with a critique of libidinal economy, yet they are cautious to note that these should not be confounded and merged, but that their differentiating investments should be integrated into the analysis. I argue, largely following Macherey, that by integrating desire into the infrastructure, they intend to flatten or collapse the infrastructure/superstructure in order to re-materialize ideology critique (as noology critique). The second point is that Deleuze and Guattari want to save desire from ideology, and show that in fact there is an economy of desire, or that desire is part of the economy. They explicitly refer to Pierre Klossowski’s *The Living Currency* (1970) on this point, to make evident the association of desire with ideology (“two kinds of fantasy”), for desire, drives and affects “creat[e] within the economic forms their own repression, as well as the means for breaking this repression.”¹⁸

17 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 104. This is again emphasized in an interview, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “On Anti-Oedipus,” in Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 19. Frédéric Lordon has recently developed this problem forcefully in *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx of Desire*, trans. Gabriel Ash (London/New York: Verso Books, 2014). For Lordon, the desires of the workers are captured by the “master-desire” of the employers. Even though Lordon makes clear that the bosses (patrons) are not only employers, and so the worker-employer opposition found in this book for the most part differs from Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the production of desire.

18 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 63. See also, Pierre Klossowski, *The Living Currency*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Vernon W. Cisney, and Nicolae Morar (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming 2016).

Readers of *A Thousand Plateaus* will certainly remember the bold and provocative statement “there is no ideology and never has been.”¹⁹ Yet, far from denying ideology itself this statement was intended to be performative and dramatic, much like a slogan, as Robert Porter has astutely described it.²⁰ As we will see further, for Deleuze and Guattari, once ideology is transformed into “noology,” the power relations and the technical wiring of thought become evident and the evasive understanding of ideology as “ideology-cloud”²¹ disappears. This transformation is made possible by integrating Foucault’s work, as a point of no return, but also by continuing the critique of images of thought that occupied a central place in Deleuze’s early work from *Nietzsche and Philosophy* to *Difference and Repetition*, and later in *Cinema 2: Time-Image* and *What Is Philosophy?* In the English preface to *Difference and Repetition* written in 1986, Deleuze adds that the project of the image of thought (noology) remains for him “the most necessary and the most concrete.”²² In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari conclude that the image of thought is the plane of immanence, it is the image of “what it means to think” and the image of “the uses of thought” in a particular society at a given moment: “[t]he image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right.”²³ Every society produces an image of thought, and the new image of thought never fully replaces the old image, but superposes the old one

19 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4.

20 Robert Porter, “From Clichés to Slogans: Towards a Deleuze-Guattarian Critique of Ideology,” *Social Semiotics*, 20, no. 3 (2010): 233–45, at 239.

21 I am using Michel Pêcheux’s expression “ideology-cloud” (*idéologie-nuage*) as discussed by Macherey, see *Le Sujet des normes*, 290–98. The other notion that Pêcheux introduced in his general theory of ideology in 1968 was “ideology-cement” (*idéologie-ciment*), which implies the proximity and materiality of ideology as opposed to the floating weightlessness of the “ideology-cloud.”

22 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xvii. Again in 1988, in an interview with François Ewald for *Le magazine littéraire*, Deleuze explains that noology should be the program of philosophy. See Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 148–49.

23 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (London/New York: Verso Books, 1994), 37.

as a new layer or stratum. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari refer to noological time as “a stratigraphic time”:

A stratum or layer of the plane of immanence will necessarily be *above* or *below* in relation to another, and images of thought cannot arise in any order whatever because they involve changes of orientation that can be directly located only on the earlier image [...].²⁴

Noologies do not arrive in sequence, the old one replacing the new one, rather, they accumulate over time; they are part of a process of sedimentation. Noology is the project of both diagnosing the current and the older strata (the images below), and constructing new layers of sedimentation. The production of new images of thought is particularly difficult and painful since it requires a certain violence to overcome the shared indifference attached to the activity of thinking.²⁵

The new category of noology is necessary in their endeavor to leave behind the equivocation and the ambivalence attached to the notion of “ideology.” I argue that it was not simply to rebut the Marxist tradition that both Foucault and Deleuze-Guattari adopted new terminologies: the organization of power or the “art of government” for Foucault, and noology for Deleuze and Guattari. This practice of using new terms (noology) to contribute to the re-elaboration of a classic concept (ideology) is not unique in Deleuze and Guattari. We can compare this to their treatment of the notion of “utopia,” suggesting that it can be replaced by Samuel Butler’s “Erewhon,” a term that refers simultaneously to “No-where” and “Now-here.”²⁶ Concepts are perishable and can be mutilated, they need to be re-activated

24 Ibid., 58.

25 I have attempted to explain this aspect of Deleuze’s thought in Benoît Dillet, “What is Called Thinking? When Deleuze Walks Along Heideggerian Paths,” *Deleuze Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 250–74.

26 “[I]n view of the mutilated meaning public opinion has given to it, perhaps utopia is not the best word” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 100).

or remodeled to fit the new state of affairs. Just as Deleuze referred to Charles Péguy's expression that events can rot or decompose when losing their dynamism, concepts too can rot.²⁷ Every concept derives from a necessity but these are historically determined, and there is a historicity of concepts.

We can admit indeed, given the conditions of formation, that "ideology" is not a very good concept [...] [but] are there concepts that can be considered "good all the way" and that did not need to be safeguarded against recuperations [*dérive*]?²⁸

This effort of updating ideology-theory by Macherey should be welcome and pursued, hence my modest contribution to this debate here.

Familialism

When one is looking for ideology in *Anti-Oedipus*, "familialism" first comes to mind. Familialism could be defined as both the reduction by psychoanalysts of the forms of mental and social disorder to the Oedipal complex, as well as the strict naturalization of the family-structure that conditions this interpretative framework. Polemically, Deleuze and Guattari write about the Oedipal complex: "In reality it is a completely ideological beginning, for the sake of ideology."²⁹ For them, the Oedipal complex is not false, since such a position would be equally problematic and ideological, but *participates* in ideology ("for the sake of ideology"), and ultimately, in capital. The whole project of *Anti-Oedipus* was therefore "the denunciation of Oedipus as the "inevitable illusion" falsifying all historical production."³⁰ Their critique of ideology could not be clearer here. Yet we should not

27 Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 170.

28 Macherey, *Études*, 87.

29 Ibid., 101.

30 Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006), 309.

rush to the thought that the Oedipal schema is a falsifying production because it is repressing the individual, or because individuals desire it. This is the mistake that certain authors made by attempting to argue for a Freud-Marx synthesis. Reich and others were too quick at identifying “social repression [*répression*] and psychic repression [*refoulement*] at the cost of a series of illusions and led to hypostasize ‘sexual liberation’ as the object of the struggles of emancipation.”³¹ Contrary to these forms of Freudo-Marxism, Deleuze and Guattari treat familialism as an image of thought, and in doing so they will therefore argue that Oedipus does exist and, even more surprisingly, they will claim that the material existence of Oedipus is universal:

Yes, Oedipus is universal. But the error lies in having believed in the following alternative: either Oedipus is the product of the social repression-psychic repression system, in which case it is not universal; or it is universal, and a position of desire. In reality, it is universal because it is the displacement of the limit that haunts all societies, the displaced represented [*le représenté déplacé*] that disfigures what all societies dread absolutely as their most profound negative: namely, the decoded flows of desire.³²

In this remarkable passage, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the error of Oedipus will not disappear so easily given its material existence in society, particularly in relations with “universal history.” But what is “universal history” and what is its relation to noology? Universal history should be understood as the contingent integration in all societies of two limits: the absolute limit of schizophrenia as the dazzling and anarchical creative production of the unconscious, and the relative limit of capital that is integrated within the social to produce its immanent dy-

31 Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, *Deleuze et l'Anti-Cédipe: La production du désir* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010), 82.

32 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 177.

namism.³³ Capitalism is ultimately hypocritical since it portrays itself as a moderate mechanism of distribution of wealth (via the notorious trickle down effect for instance) while functioning on the constant displacement of its limits: “things work well only providing they break down, crises [are] ‘the means immanent to the capitalist mode of production.’”³⁴

The overall objective of *Anti-Oedipus* is to show the correspondence and the analogy at work between familialism and capital. Capitalism can only constantly displace its limits by re-integrating new roles for “daddy-mommy-me.”³⁵ In other words, the Oedipal noology is found not only at the level of psychoanalytic practice but, more crucially, at the level of the *socius*: it is the historical production of reality that is abstracted. Therefore, to study familialism noologically means to study its social institutions and its social (re)production, both in terms of content (related to bodies) and expressions (related to signs). Deleuze and Guattari want to “revamp the theory of ideology by saying that expressions and statements intervene directly in productivity, in the form of a production of meaning or sign-value.”³⁶ Put differently, the only theory of ideology that they would agree with is one that studies the intervention of expressions and functions in the mode of libidinal and economic production. Such a general theory of ideology (as noology) would account for the images that create an adhesion to the capitalist system.

By taking a closer look at *Anti-Oedipus*, one finds this revamped theory of ideology beginning with what Deleuze and Guattari call the axiomatic. They refer to the capitalist axiomatic as the organization of rules (axioms) that underlie the capitalist

33 This thesis about the internal limit of capitalism that is constantly displaced is interpreted from Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Marx’s *Capital* book III. They write: “If capitalism is the exterior limit of all societies, this is because capitalism for its part has no exterior limit, but only an interior limit that is capital itself and that it does not encounter, but reproduces by always displacing it” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 230–31).

34 Ibid., 230.

35 Ibid., 51.

36 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 89.

machinery, but this axiomatic is far from being static. On the contrary, it is extremely plastic and adaptable to new situations and forms of contestation: "How much flexibility there is in the axiomatic of capitalism, always ready to widen its own limits so as to add a new axiom to a previously saturated system!"³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari use the term axiomatic rather than ideology since it explains the operability of capitalism and the performativity of the capitalist axioms. The axiomatic constantly metamorphoses, or to be more precise, it is composed of layers of sedimentation, in which a new layer always covers a previous one. There is a constant movement forward, and the new axiom that supplements and modifies slightly the orientation of the capitalist axiomatic attempts to overshadow the previous axiom: "memory has become a bad thing."³⁸ The capitalist axiomatic has also emptied out the meaning of language and transformed it into a domain of "order-words":

Above all, there is no longer any need of belief, and the capitalist is merely striking a pose when he bemoans the fact that nowadays no one believes in anything any more. Language no longer signifies something that must be believed, it indicates rather what is going to be done.³⁹

Language is turned into a functional realm in which there is no room for enlarging sympathies. The axiomatic noologically intends to replace the social by the space and time of capital but "one must not think that it replaces the *socius*" since the social machine and the technical machines are two different types of machines.⁴⁰ In these extracts, Deleuze and Guattari conduct their ideology critique without falling prey to a cynicism that refuses to critique capitalism and its inner workings, but emphasize the disappearance of belief that underlies the capital-

37 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 238.

38 Ibid., 250.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 251.

ist axiomatic. In short, while classical and orthodox Marxists argued that ideology distorted reality and led workers to forget about the material production of their lives, Deleuze and Guattari on the other hand demonstrate that ideology in the 1970s was characterized by the privation of those distorted realities (beliefs); ideology had become ideology-cement instead of ideology-cloud.⁴¹

Once all beliefs disappear, hope disappears, friendship and the family disappear, cynicism grows, and the social reproduction works through images that come to govern our existence. These images are the functions of thought that circulate in the *socius*:

We have repudiated and lost all our beliefs that proceeded by way of objective representations. The earth is dead, the desert is growing; the old father is dead, the territorial father, and the son too, the despot Oedipus. We are alone with our bad conscience and our boredom, our life where nothing happens; nothing left but images that revolve within the infinite subjective representation. We will muster all our strength so as to believe in these images, from the depths of a structure that governs our relationships with them [...].⁴²

This new economy of images appears in the ruins caused by cynicism and in the extreme faith in objectivity. Yet this objectivity is not sufficiently denounced, as Deleuze and Guattari note, for not being objective, but, on the contrary, for passing for objectivity. They critique the idea of general equivalence on which capitalism rests by demonstrating that “capitalists and their economists” assert that “surplus value cannot be determined mathematically.”⁴³ The same capitalists do everything “in favor of the very thing they are bent on hiding; that it is not the

41 “The unidimensional society has taken away ideology’s capacity to create illusions” (Macherey, *Le sujet des normes*, 324).

42 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 308.

43 *Ibid.*, 228.

same money that goes into the pocket of the wage earner and is entered on the balance sheet of a commercial enterprise.”⁴⁴ In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari present a concrete noological study, they uncover the institutionality and materiality of thought (the notorious “confidence of the market”). The institutional organization of the distribution of money that is supposedly rational and mathematic is in fact largely based on a dissimulation operated by the financial system: “one is correct in speaking of a profound *dissimulation* of the dualism of these two forms of money, payment and financing — the two aspects of banking practice.”⁴⁵ In their noology critique, Deleuze and Guattari therefore find the hidden formula of the two forms of money that are mediated by the bank: ideology is located in the financial institutional system itself.⁴⁶ The paradox of money is that, on the one hand, we take money as being the most objective fact in our lives, but on the other, we know that it operates through “contingent rules” that are abstracted from our lives.⁴⁷

To take an example, we can refer to the current “mediamacro” in place in the United Kingdom that equates government budgets with household budgets (“keeping the books”) so that the ideological message of austerity “one should not spend more than one has” gets largely integrated into the *doxa*: everyone (individuals and firms) have to tighten their belts.⁴⁸ To equate indi-

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 229, emphasis in the original.

46 Read comments on Deleuze’s distinction between an arithmetical and a differential understanding of surplus-value introduced in one of his Vincennes courses in December 1971: the first one is quantifiable while the second one refuses equivalence. The differential understanding emphasizes the construction of the equivalence between a unit of money and a unit of knowledge: “there is an encounter between a flow of money and a flow of knowledge” (Read, “Fetish is Always Actual,” 91).

47 Martijn Konings, *The Emotional Logic of Capitalism: What Progressives Have Missed* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3.

48 I borrow the term “mediamacro” from Simon Wren-Lewis, to refer to the vulgarized discourse on macroeconomics largely present in the UK media. See Simon Wren-Lewis, “The Austerity Con,” *London Review of Books* 37, no. 4, February 19, 2015, 9–11.

vidual household budgets and government budgets is extremely misleading and clearly participates in a political project.⁴⁹

Yet, this apparent objectivity of capital, Deleuze and Guattari note, is “by no means a failure to recognize or an illusion of consciousness,” but rather the productive essence of financial capitalism itself.⁵⁰ It is precisely because the desire for money is a desire for one’s own powerlessness that the dissimulation is productive and not deceptive or distracting.⁵¹ The difference between the absolute limit that schizophrenia represents (all structures break down in schizophrenia; it is a dissolution of the subject and productive work) and the relative limit of capitalism lies in the process of re-integrating the decoded flows of desire in an axiomatic.⁵² As I explained earlier, the construction of this axiomatic is a constant process of adding new axioms, much like sedimentation: one function (axiom) does not fully replace the former function but only adds a new dimension to conjure and to push back the moment of the ultimate breakdown (the absolute limit). This is why “the bourgeois is justified in saying, not in terms of ideology, but in the very organization of his axiomatic: there is only one machine,” and not two classes with opposing interests.⁵³ The notorious slogan of neoliberalism “there is no alternative” is not a mere ideological statement but an organization of the axiomatic, since the axiomatic is defined by its singularity that gathers all axioms and binds individuals into a single social machine. The “bourgeois” works at the noological level of functions and the axiomatic, that is in a post-ideological

49 This can be compared to Paul Krugman’s oft-cited argument that business and economics should be differentiated. See Paul Krugman, “A Country Is Not a Company,” *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 1996, 40–51.

50 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 239.

51 “[T]he flow of merchant capital’s economic force and the flow that is derivatively named ‘purchasing power’ — a flow made truly impotent [impuissant] that represents the absolute impotence [impuissance] of the wage earner as well as the relative dependence of the industrial capitalist” (ibid., 238–39).

52 On this important distinction, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 245–47.

53 Ibid., 254.

world making up the social machine. Once again Deleuze and Guattari want to contrast an analysis that takes into account noology, functions, and the axiomatic on the one hand, with the ill-suited dogmatic Marxist framework that focuses on class consciousness, false consciousness, thought-contents, beliefs, and the “superstructure” on the other. It is precisely because beliefs and ideology have vanished that the Marxist ideology theory (although Deleuze and Guattari portray a rather crude version of it) is no longer relevant.

Images of capital and images of images

Having discussed how Deleuze and Guattari transformed the project of ideology critique into a project that takes into account desire, not as an immaterial and weightless substance but in its materiality, we can now go as far as to conclude that they aimed to study the material inscriptions of ideology: transforming ideology critique into geology or physics.⁵⁴ At this point, we need to come back to the loss of belief and the reign of images to understand how Deleuze provides an answer to questions about the capitalist exploitation of abstract desire in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.

There are at least two reasons why the turn to images is crucial here. First, instead of representation it is the materiality of images that interests Deleuze, the circulation of these images, continuing in a way Benjamin's early reflections on the reproducibility of images. Second, the analyses of images continue the noology project, of studying the historicity of the images of thought.

Social reproduction is established with image-functions, and just as philosophy has conceptual personae, capitalism has “figures.” Through the production of these figures and roles es-

54 “But in reality, the unconscious belongs to the realm of physics; the body without organs and its intensities are not metaphors, but matter itself” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 283).

tablished within the axiomatic, individuals become functions integrated in the axiomatic:

[Individuals] are nothing more or less than configurations or images produced by the points-signs, the breaks-flows, the pure “figures” of capitalism: the capitalist as personified capital — i.e., as a function derived from the flow of capital; and the worker as personified labor capacity — i.e., a function derived from the flow of labor.⁵⁵

Deleuze and Guattari conclude that, through the mechanism of social reproduction in place in familialism, private persons are secondary, they are “images of images,” images of the second order.⁵⁶ The familialist images operate by copying the images of capital. This is why they call these private images, “images of images” or “simulacra.”⁵⁷ In capitalism the images of the first order are generated to capture the flows of desire by capital. Desires are captured and abstracted to fit in one of the images produced by capitalism: “[C]apitalism fills its field of immanence with images: even destitution, despair, revolt — and on the other side, the violence and the oppression of capital — become images of destitutions, despair, revolt, violence, or oppression.”⁵⁸ It is also because of the withering of belief that the old understanding of ideology as belief system does not work anymore for neoliberal societies (after the 1970s). Beliefs have been “flattened” by the axiomatic, to use a word that is recurrent in this third chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*. An entire “psychology of the priest” is organized by the images of capital that are reproduced by their simulacra in the family structure (the father as the capitalist, and so on).⁵⁹ But contrary to what we may think at first, there is no contra-

55 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 264.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 “Father, mother, and child thus become the simulacrum of the images of capital (“Mister Capital, Madame Earth,” and their child the Worker), with the result that these images are no longer recognized at all in the desire

diction between the withering of belief and the extreme moralization of society.⁶⁰ Bad conscience is socially organized and reinforced by the images and the melodrama. In the economy of images, the bad passions are strictly dominating:

[D]epression and guilt [are] used as a means of contagion, the kiss of the Vampire: aren't you ashamed to be happy? follow my example, I won't let you go before you say, "It's my fault." O ignoble contagion of the depressives, neurosis as the only illness consisting in making others ill [...] the abject desire to be loved, the whimpering at not being loved enough, at not being "understood" [...].⁶¹

In the vacuity of belief and the reign of images, the role of schizoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus* and of cinema in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, would be to produce images against the images of capital. The struggle against the economy of sad passions cannot be launched at the level of positive messages and content, but rather at the material level, in the physics of thought, to change the image of thought (what it means to think): "[I]mages are not in our head, in our brain. The brain is just one image among others."⁶² It is an image of thought to conceive the brain as a recipient of images, while in fact the organization of the brain is co-constituted with the exteriorizations. The image of the brain shapes how thought processes take place, what limitations one puts on one's thought. Deleuze would argue that the powers that be have an interest in keeping a socially accepted image of the brain as a calculating machine that fits the *homo economicus*. Noology critique operates from inventing new human and non-human assemblages instead of clinging to old structures of thought. There is no contradiction between the micro and

that is determined to invest only their simulacrum. The familial determinations become the application of the social axiomatic" (ibid.)

60 On this paradox, see Mark Alizart, *Pop théologie: protestantisme et postmodernité* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2015).

61 Ibid., 268–69.

62 Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 42, translation modified.

macro levels, instead the flattened understanding of ideology takes into account the relations between all levels. “It is not that our thinking starts from what we know about the brain but that any new thought traces uncharted channels directly through its matter, twisting, folding and fissuring it.”⁶³ Thinking is a micro-physical operation in the brain, rather than an immaterial product. But this microphysics does not mean that noology forgets about the hierarchization and verticalization at work in societies — familialism and hylemorphism are examples of such relations of domination.

What is fundamental in noology critique is that it does not and cannot work without inventing new forms of thought. The production of new images in cinema is an example of such a production for Deleuze to “restore our belief in this world.”⁶⁴ Deleuze distinguishes here between a cerebral cinema and a cinema of control.⁶⁵ While the latter produces clichés and melodramas, the former creates new types of images (through lectosigns and noosigns) in the chain of images. What interests Deleuze in cinema is how certain images attempt to break from clichés (or the “images of images”) that private individuals are subjected to in the capitalist axiomatic. Since we are embedded in the dark world of images of images (simulacra), we can only rework these types of images by standing behind the camera, from the depth of the cave, instead of succumbing to these:

On the one hand, the image constantly sinks to the state of cliché [...] [and] it is a civilization of the cliché where all the powers have an interest in hiding images from us [...]. On the other hand, at the same time, the image constantly attempts to break through the cliché, to get out of the cliché.⁶⁶

63 Ibid., 149.

64 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 172.

65 This is particularly well contrasted in his letter to Serge Daney (Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 68–79).

66 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 21.

The project of creating “images” — and therefore brains (“give me a brain”⁶⁷) — in cinema allows for the possibility of breaking with the civilization of clichés in order to believe in this world again.

67 Ibid., 196.